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JOSH FINE

The Avengers: Earth's Mightiest Heroes Supervising Producer Josh Fine talks to Marvel Animation Age about bringing the first thirteen episodes of *The Avengers: Earths Mightiest Heroes* to DVD and what is on tap for the second season. The first 13 episodes of the *The Avengers: Earth's Mightiest Heroes* animated series are now available on DVD, spread over two volume releases, from Walt Disney Studios Home Entertainment.

Marvel Animation Age: First off, quickly run us through what we can expect on the firs two *The Avengers: Earth's Mightiest Heroes* DVDs being released!

Josh Fine: The two discs comprise the first half of Season 1. With the first volume you get the origin of the team in the first 7 episodes of the series: 'Iron Man is Born', 'Thor the Mighty', 'Hulk Versus the World', 'Meet Captain America', 'The Man in the Ant Hill', and 'Breakout, Part One' and 'Breakout, Part Two'

In the second volume, the team's epic challenges begin. You get the return of Captain America, Black Panther's mission to reclaim his kingdom, and the Leader's nefarious plot to turn the entire population of the world into Gamma Monsters. The episodes included are 'Some Assembly Required', 'Living Legend', 'Everything is Wonderful', 'Panther's Quest', 'Gamma World, Part One' and 'Gamma World, Part Two'.

MAA: How involved were you in the discs coming together? Did you have any input on the presentation for the series? What about the bonus material included?

JF: I'm always involved with pretty much every aspect of a series, from the creative work of actually putting the show together, to working with licensing partners on products and approvals, to working with Disney on their broadcasting and DVD plans.

In this case the folks at Walt Disney Studios Home Entertainment made it very easy. They came to us with some pretty sharp-looking mock-ups for what they wanted to covers to be, they had a great team of folks put together plans for the bonus features and do the interviews, and they really knocked the menu design out of the park on their first try.

MAA: Are these two DVDs that will appeal to both the die-hard and casual fans? Why?

JF: As with the tone of the series in general, which seeks to both attract the new viewer and keep our die-hard audience happy, we definitely wanted the discs to appeal to both audiences. For casual fans, you get the first 13 episodes of the season—a great entry point into the Avengers and into the Marvel Universe in general, even if you don't know anything about the characters.

For the die-hard fan, we included some features that should be pretty exciting. The episodes are presented in their original 16x9 format, with 5.1 surround sound for the first time. For anyone that has the opportunity, I highly recommend checking out the 5.1 mix on the episodes—the hard work that our incredibly talented sound design team put into the episodes is taken to another level in surround.

We've also included a pretty cool featurette on each disc, each one looking at an aspect of the series so far and some of the things you can look forward to in Season 2. For any fan dying to know what's coming next for the series, these are a must-watch!

MAA: Can you quickly run us through the first 13 episodes included? Just provide your brief thoughts on them as a whole, I suppose. How do they serve as a good introduction for new viewers while not foregoing the comic fans?

JF: Our goal with The Avengers: Earth's Mightiest Heroes was to capture the most classic, iconic versions of these characters possible. To capture the feel of the team in the comics, from the in-fighting, to the epic scale of the threats they face, to the moments of super-human sacrifice that they go through.

The goal with the first five episodes, 'Iron Man is Born', 'Thor the Mighty', 'Hulk Versus the World', 'Meet Captain America', and 'The Man in the Ant Hill' was to introduce us to the individual members of the team in a series of shorts, before the cataclysmic event that causes the Avengers to assemble for the first time. One thing that was always cool and unique for me about the Avengers as a team is that, when the book first came out, each of the guys on the roster—Iron Man, Thor, Hulk, Ant-Man and Wasp—they were all already stars of their own ongoing series. The Avengers took this group of Marvel's most popular, most powerful characters, and explored what would happen if they were forced to band together to face the foes that no single Super Hero could defeat.

Going into the series, I really wanted to find a way to capture that aspect of the team. I had the idea to take the first five episodes of the season, carve them up into little five and a half minute segments, and create a micro-series that would let us explore the individual members of the team in their own ongoing adventures. This way we could do a lot of character development and set-up—really set the stage for the rest of the season. Not only could we do these really cool, action-packed micro stories devoted to individual characters, but it would let the audience become invested in the heroes and the world, so that when things start to go south in the Breakout episodes, they really care about what's going to happen. And hopefully it would help capture some of that awe-inspiring feeling of seeing all of these guys that have now been set-up joining together on a single team, in the same way that Stan Lee and Jack Kirby did it all those years ago.

'Breakout, Parts One and Two' are really the true 'pilot' of the show. The first five episodes are definitely important set-up to understanding the series, but Breakout is where the show actually becomes The Avengers. Thanks to the set-up we did in the first five, 'Breakout' lets us really hit the ground running. A mass Super-Villain exodus from four separate Super-Villain prisons causes our heroes to come together for the first time. The action had to be huge. It had to be on a scale like we've never felt before. When we approached the fight with Graviton in the second episode, we really wanted it to feel like... "how are they going to win this? How can they possibly defeat someone with that kind of power?" Individually they can't. But as they start to work together as a team, they discover that they're capable of a lot more assembled than they are apart.

'Some Assembly Required' (incidentally probably my favorite of Chris Yost's episode titles in Season 1) is the team's day 1. This is where we get to see some of that classic Avengers in-fighting start to take place. These guys are human beings. They're emotional. They don't always (or ever—in the case of the Hulk) play nicely with others. Fun fact on this one: when Chris and I were originally tackling the story, the plan wasn't to have the Hulk leave the team at the end. But once we got done with—I think—the outline, it just felt like we'd missed an opportunity. Just like in the second issue of Stan Lee and Jack Kirby's original run on Avengers, there's certain exciting value to having the Hulk leave the team so soon. It makes you go, "did they really just do that? Already?!" It hopefully leaves you feeling like anything could happen. We got rid of a main character in the second full story of the season. Who's really safe? A nice side effect of this is that it freed up some roster space to let us focus on the other guys, and the soon to join Captain America and Black Panther in upcoming episodes.

From there, we had a lot more mixing of old and new. Just like in the comics, Cap gets unfrozen in the very next episode 'Living Legend' and begins to find his place on the team, while dealing with being a man out of time. The Masters of Evil begin to come together as a dark answer to the Avengers' Super Hero team-up. And in a pair of huge episodes—two of my favorite of the season—the Leader attempts to turn the entire planet's population into Gamma irradiated mutates for himself to rule.

For people that know the books, this series throws classic storylines, modern storylines, literally hundreds of characters, allusions, cameos, and in-jokes their way. For those that have never opened a comic-book before, this series is a great introduction to the Marvel Universe. You get to know the biggest players in Marvel's line-up, from Iron Man, to Captain America, to Thor—but also the little guys, like Ant-Man and Wasp whom you might never have even heard of. And for those inbetween—perhaps folks that are only familiar with these characters by way of the live-action movies, you'll find a lot that's carried over into the series. At its core it's just a fun, character-driven, action-packed story. If you're a fan of action, drama, comedy, epic heroics, time-travelling conquerors, pretty animation, or super-powered monkeys then *The Avengers: Earth's Mightiest Heroes* has something to offer you.

MAA: The extras will give a look into the second season of the show. Care to drop any tantalizing hints on what we'll see?

JF: You'll see quite a lot actually, and yet it doesn't even scratch the surface of what's to come in Season 2. In one featurette you'll get a look at some of the characters that are coming in the second season of the show, including the highly anticipated introduction of Ms. Marvel. In another one you'll get a sneak-peek at some of the storylines that we'll be exploring in the season—which is going to be our cosmic, alien, throw-down of a season.

MAA: To continue on the "second season" route for a moment, there seems to be a bit of worry going through the *The Avengers: Earth's Mightiest Heroes* fanbase right now that we might not actually see the second season (based off the show switching timeslots, new episodes debuting oversees first, how *Wolverine and the X-Men* was cancelled, etc.). Please, can you do us a favor and put everyone's minds at ease?

JF: Short of the world ending early (the Mayan calendar was wrong!) I can't really envision a scenario where fans don't get to see these episodes. The second season is already mostly completed. Over half of the episodes have already been finished, mastered, locked up, and are just waiting to air. The rest are in various stages of post production. Barring any unforeseen disasters, production of the second season should be all finished up during the summer.

Also, I've seen the episodes (I may have had something to do with making them) and they're AMAZING. Folks in the US and Canada have a lot to look forward to in Season 1 still, with some huge storylines still to come in the last 7 episodes of the season. But Season two picks up where we left off and just keeps getting bigger and more intense. It's a good time to be a Marvel fan!

MAA: Finally, tell us why we should spend our hard-earned cash on these first two *The Avengers: Earth's Mightiest Heroes* DVDs?

JF: The special features have interviews with me on them! What other reason do you need?! Also, I have it on good authority that if fans of the show don't buy the DVDs, Hulk will find you and SMASH you. You don't want to make Hulk angry. And a good way to keep Hulk happy is to make sure that he's getting residuals.

Also, the show's pretty good. There's that.

Avengers Assemble!

Marvel Animation Age would like to thank Josh Fine for his participation in this Q & A!

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